

Case 10-23

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The Honorable Anthony Hood
Chairman of the Zoning Commission
DC Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to you in opposition to Case 10-23, the proposed development of the “Babe’s” lot on Wisconsin Avenue and Brandywine Street in Tenleytown. Because this building would be allowed greater height and density than required by current regulations and would not be subject to existing on-site parking requirements, I believe that the construction of the building would have a negative impact on the neighborhood as well as set an unfortunate and worrisome precedent for future building along Wisconsin Avenue in Tenleytown.

It is the neighborhood which will bear the risk of these irreversible consequences of this building proposal:

- * two floors of retail without on-site parking provided will incur parking spillover into the already parked-up nearby streets,
- * sixty-five residential units without on-site parking provided will cause further parking spillover into those same neighborhood streets,
- * a higher structure means less light, more shadow for the lower buildings in the vicinity,
- * a higher structure also changes the scale and the human dimension of the overall architectural fabric of Tenleytown,
- * a structure which will be the wedge for sterile, canyon-like Bethesda-type development,
- * a structure with a denser residential ratio adds a further burden to an already underperforming Metro stop(e.g., escalators frequently out).

Why would a developer, ANC, neighborhood and city wish to so change the character of an already solid, established, stable and safe community?

Who on your commission or in other bodies responsible for the decision on this proposed development lives in the immediately affected areas and would thus directly feel the negative impact? Who on the commission does not own a car? Who on the

commission has ever run a retail business, much less a retail business that could survive without convenient customer parking?

My husband and I moved to Tenleytown from New York City almost 25 years ago; his work brought him to DC and we wanted to live close in enough so that he could commute by public transportation. We liked the energy of living in a city but wanted a safe, pretty and comfortable neighborhood in which to raise our family. Our home is a block and a half in from Wisconsin Avenue; buses run along the avenue and indeed across from Connecticut to Wisconsin Avenue up our street; the Tenley Metro stop is but a 10 minute walk away. This quiet neighborhood is rich in amenities: the restored and renovated firehouse, newly rebuilt library, good schools, an array of large and small independently-owned restaurants and shops, banks, a supermarket, and a couple of what we consider "corner shops" - Ibrahim has been proprietor of our 7-Eleven for at least 20 years, he knows us all and greets us by name.

What makes pleasant living possible so near busy Wisconsin Avenue, in addition to the conveniences, is the livable scale of the commercial buildings near our residential blocks; for the most part the structures aren't more than 2-3 stories; our homes are not overshadowed by larger buildings and the activities of their residents and workers.

Do we have parking issues on our block? from time to time, yes! I would say that half of our neighbors do not have a garage or parking area on their property and therefore park on the street: families with two or more small children, an elderly couple, a family with a disabled child, a single woman who commutes to Silver Spring, real estate agents - these are people who need a car, in addition to whatever use they may make of the buses or Metro or biking. Spillover parking from Wisconsin Avenue can take up most of the other spaces: from the Taiwan Cultural Center around the corner, the Psychiatric Association building and Sullivan's Toys across the street, patrons of the small restaurants nearby.

Tenleytown wouldn't be, couldn't be Tenleytown without the people who love to live here and have invested themselves in the heritage of this neighborhood, to name a few: residents and local associations are responsible for saving our library, our old houses and firehouse and Grant Road, notable buildings on the American University campus; the Methodist Cemetery; keeping new development within an appropriate scale for the neighborhoods. Our schools are now full to bursting with children of the neighborhoods and across the city. For example, 20 years ago the city wanted to close down Hearst School, and it was parent advocacy that kept it open, it's now undergoing a huge expansion project to accommodate the demand. It is the long-time residents and homeowners, those who have "skin in the game," who on their own time take care for our community.

My family was overseas for several years - we rented our house while we were gone. When we came back two years ago we were delighted to see that our neighborhood was still "neighborhoody," although so close to ever-busier Wisconsin Avenue - some

old friends had passed on, others had moved, new young families had arrived. The tree canopy of old elms, although under threat of disease and age, continues to survive.

But change has come to my block, and Tenleytown - and I question the decisions made and those yet in the making:

* My ANC3F SMD 07 has been gerrymandered away from Wisconsin Avenue to relate to the Reno Road/Connecticut Avenue. Occasionally I have business over there - I have met many of those ANC commissioners and residents - but that is not the area of my concern as a resident of Tenleytown. Why, in this time of proposed huge change for Wisconsin Avenue, would I and my neighbors be removed from creating a unified voice in expressing our concerns about development so close to us?

Construction has already begun at nearby American University for its new law school campus on Tenley Circle - and that in two years several thousands of law students, faculty, continuing education students and others will be flooding Tenleytown? The pressures - and financial incentives - that will be brought to bear for changes to what makes historic Tenleytown so pleasant and livable will wreak irreparable damage to the fabric of our community.

Tenleytown is such a successful place to live because residents care to be good stewards of those elements which make it such a pleasure to live in.

And so I return to the matter of the Babe's proposal. Development per se is not the issue - it's what kind of development and its consequences that can destroy what it seeks to benefit from.

* Who benefits by building a structure with no on-site parking so that spillover parking "overparks" our neighborhood streets?

In conclusion let me return to four of the questions which are central to any responsible decision affecting Tenleytown:

Why would a developer, ANC, neighborhood and city wish to so change the character of an already solid, established, stable and safe community?

Who on your commission or in other bodies responsible for the decision on this proposed development lives in the immediately affected areas and would thus directly feel the negative impact? Who on the commission does not own a car? Who on the commission has ever run a retail business, much less a retail business that could survive without convenient customer parking?

Therefore, I request that the commission turn down this proposal because in its current form the development would irreparably damage our neighborhood.

Yours sincerely,
Melissa and John Kunstadter

